

NOYES (I.R.)

The Peruvian Mummy.

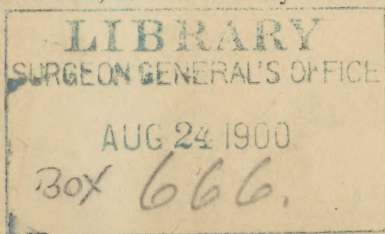
presented -

[Read before the Anthropological Society, Washington, D. C.,
Tuesday evening, April 5th, 1898.]

In the disposition of the body after death many different forms have prevailed. From the care that many of the ancient nations took of the body after life was extinct, it is evident that they held the body in high esteem. Perhaps they desired that it should be so well preserved that it would be ever ready for some "resurrection morn," or some period of reincarnation. On this subject they had peculiar ideas of economy. Yet in the case of the Egyptians, they very inconsistently removed from the body the very part—the brains—that gave it any special value. They could not well preserve the brains, so they are said to have extracted them. And here is an opportunity for some humorist to indulge his fancy in having, when the time comes for resurrection, the wrong body to be supplied with the wrong brains—brains that would not fit the body; or, for an ineffectual search for even any brains to supply the mental power.

Among many of the ancient nations there was a great reverence for the mere body after death. Yet they were not all after this order; for some of them, we know, in this respect had as little regard for the body after death as prevails at the present day.

At death all that gives value to the body departs; we know not where. That this all-important power should have no further existence does not seem reasonable, at least to many of us. That



it should exist only with the life, and endure only so long as that endures, seems unworthy of the Great Cause that created all nature. The immortality of the soul, therefore, seems very consistent with our high appreciation of the Power that created it.

No subject before the world has been of greater interest to mankind. Surely, we cannot prove, as we can prove many other things, that the soul is immortal. Still it has been a most potent belief with the world—from the earliest ages down to the present time.

Many of the ancient nations taught the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and from the evidence of the Peruvian mummy it is obvious that the ancient Peruvians, too, were firm believers in this most agreeable doctrine. They devoted much attention to the body after death, as though they anticipated that it would again become the abode of the soul; that the soul had only departed from it for a season, and that in God's good time it would again become reincarnated with the spirit that gave it value; and that, after lying dormant for a period, the body would advance on to some higher sphere.

The Parsees, having the religious teachings of the ancient Eastern world to inspire them, laid particular stress upon the idea that the human body must depart from life in the same condition that it entered upon its existence here. Naked the body came into the world, and naked it must depart. So, after death, they stripped the body of every vestige of clothing, whereby the rank in life was known; and thus it is exposed to the vultures, who very soon tear the flesh from the bones and leave them to be consigned to a pit where no distinction is known.

While this reasoning and lesson may seem valueless to us, very intelligent and highly spiritual people believe in it, and even continue it to this day.

The Peruvians, on the contrary, while they did not try to preserve the flesh after the manner of the Egyptians, nor treat it with the contempt of the Parsees, did preserve it in a manner peculiar to themselves. Instead of laying the body out at full length, as did the Egyptians, they doubled up the lower limbs so that they came in close contact with the body. The hands, as a rule, are crossed on the upper part of the breast, the palms lying flat against the body, very much after the manner of the position

assumed by the early Christians. We also see this same position of the hands in the Egyptian mummy.

This is the most common position of the hands in the Peruvian mummy, though there is one in the Army and Medical Museum, which, from its superior dress, was evidently a person of high rank, wherein the lower limbs, instead of being doubled up on a line with the body, are bent as though the object was to form a good base for a sitting posture; the foot of each leg extending towards the upper part of the femur of the other. The right hand is extended to the left shoulder, and the left arm doubled up so as to bring the left hand in contact with the right; or both brought together on the left shoulder.

Then there is one with a slight variation of one of the hands, which, instead of lying upon the breast, as the other hand does, is elevated so as to support the chin.

If these variations stand for anything—and it is quite certain that they do—they would seem to convey the idea of different ranks and orders among these people.

Why the Peruvians should have adopted these peculiar styles, or the peculiar form of most of their mummies, we know not. Still, in the absence of facts, we have the right to substitute a theory; and if the theory is in accordance with certain well-known facts, it would appear to have some value.

From the more common position, where the lower limbs are on a line with the body, it would seem that, by it, they attempted at death to adopt, as near as possible, the position of the body in the womb. In the same form, as was the body prior to birth, they would preserve it after death. As they entered this world so would they enter the great world of the future, supplemented by the reverential posture of the hands.

Posture in this line would seem with them to be a very important matter. This established, we can go further, and, with little effort, infer more. For with it, it would seem to carry anatomical knowledge of the body. That is, if they knew one thing so important as this, it would go to prove that they were more or less familiar with the structure of the body, and that they understood many things that it took the world a long time to become familiar with. For example, it is asserted that they well understood the art of trepanning.

We knew that their civilization was superior, and could it only have been protected instead of being brutally crushed, we might have learned from them far more than we have, and obtained much important information as to the history and condition of the Western Continent that must now remain a blank, at least as to reliable information.

Through anthropological sources we obtain much information that is valuable. Still there must necessarily be much conjecture about it. We must be governed, as it were, by the "footprints upon the sands of time," and by the closer insight as to the full character of those "footprints," whereby we can obtain more reliable information of the individuals to whom the "footprints" belonged.

While the Peruvian mummy is unique and quite unlike the mummy of Egypt, and while there is, on certain lines, a strong contrast between them, in two respects, strange to say, they are much alike, even if not identical. In many cases, at least, the position of the hands and the expression of the face are essentially the same.

To one who has not seen these mummies it may seem strange, after the lapse of so many centuries, to thus speak of the expression of the face of a mummy, but the expression is there to speak for itself. The hands are crossed, palms inward, and extending nearly to the opposite shoulder, in harmony with what in Scripture art is known as the "Sign of the Good Shepherd." The eyes themselves soon decayed, but the expression which they gave to the features remains, and reminds one of those lines of the old hymn that refers to the

"Upward glancing of the eye
When none but God is nigh,"

or of that line in the Psalms which says :

"And mine eyes are ever looking up into the hills,
from whence cometh my help."

The spirit of the expression goes with it. The lines on these faces were so rigidly fixed, that they have remained, and will continue to remain so long as these mummies shall endure, and I trust that this will be for many ages yet to come.

The spirit that inhabited the body before life became extinct puts its stamp upon the features, and even to this day that mark endures. By some persons this may seem like drawing too much upon the imagination, but when we come in contact with these reverential mummies it would not seem to require much imagination to perceive it—to see in those “sightless orbs,” and indeed in the whole face, a most reverential expression—lines and character that antedates the Christian world many centuries, and quite independent of it, and proof to us that reverential beings existed in this world many centuries prior to the time of the Christian life in the catacombs of Rome.

Indeed, the ancient Peruvians could have had no knowledge of the Christian posture at the hour of death, or even knowledge of this more modern school of theology. As with the Peruvians, so with the Egyptians. This reverential posture was common with them both. We will not say that the Christian world copied it from the Peruvians, for that would have been impossible, and it was quite as impossible that they should have copied it from the Egyptians.

This reverential posture seems to be inherent in man. It was confined to no period, continent, or even nation or class. It was common to all; an inspiration for something higher than this life affords. A “looking up unto the hills from whence cometh our help,” and an earnest desire for something beyond this life, for a higher existence—a “yearning after immortality”—and faith in the idea that the soul is immortal. Thus the lesson that we read in these ancient mummies, Peruvian and Egyptian.

We are glad that these ancient nations, so widely separated, and having apparently no knowledge of each other, still worked on—on lines very much in common.

While this may not be all of the evidence that there is of the soul’s immortality, still there is a strong argument along this line and a sentiment that is in full harmony with Plato’s soliloquy :

“Plato, thou reasonest well,
Else whence this fond hope,
This pleasing desire, this longing after immortality?”

The mummy answereth well—that longing of the human race after immortality; even after many centuries it is strangely and

forcibly marked upon their faces, and proves to us that they in common with the great mass of humanity advocated, indorsed and verily believed in the words of the Psalmist, who says, "that man was not made for naught;" but that while "he was made lower than the angels," he was to be "crowned with glory and with worship;" and that there is an identity to the soul as well as to the body, but while the body perishes, the soul endureth throughout all generations.

ISAAC P. NOYES.

